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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR,S AUGUST 6 AND 7 MEETINGS WITH PM MALIKI

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: Ambassador Khalilzad and General Casey met on both August 6 and 7 with Prime Minister Maliki to review plans for the second phase of the Baghdad Security Plan. Maliki -- focused on national reconciliation -- hoped that residents forced out by sectarian intimidation would return once security is restored. He was concerned, however, that forceful tactics could further weaken his political footing. Maliki accordingly: took issue with our plans for checkpoints and called for a review of the checkpoint policy; asked that we curtail night operations; and asserted that he had not authorized the previous night,s operation in Sadr City. General Casey clarified that National Security Advisor Rubaie had merely communicated the PM,s "reservations," whereupon it was agreed that clear instructions are needed. Maliki said operations targeting terrorists and death squad leaders may continue, but pressed for quieter, daylight operations. General Casey stressed that the upcoming security operation must quickly be followed by Iraqi government spending for Baghdad reconstruction. END SUMMARY.

MALIKI HOPES BETTER SECURITY WILL INCREASE SUPPORT

¶2. (S) Maliki used the Ministerial Committee on National Security on August 6 to press for upcoming military operations in Baghdad to begin with an effort to simultaneously stabilize several Baghdad neighborhoods. He said that the central focus of the plan should be restoring security in focus areas in order to allow Iraqis who had been forced to move to return to their homes. He believes that, if the government can maintain security, restore essential services, and permit people to return to their homes, citizens will gain confidence in his leadership and the Iraqi security forces. Rubaie added that the return of displaced citizens will have a greater impact on public consciousness than a reduction in the number of killings.

TRAFFIC CHECKPOINTS

¶3. (S) Maliki also pressed for an approach to the Baghdad security plan that is minimally intrusive on the lives of ordinary Iraqis. Maliki, joined by Rubaie as well as the Ministers of Defense and Justice, was also concerned about plans to set up numerous checkpoints along the canal. The Iraqi leaders are hoping to avoid roadblocks, citing the negative effect on the economy and memories of Saddam,s practice of blocking cross-town traffic. They urge that an alternative to the use of concrete barriers be considered, as these create traffic problems. Maliki pushed for checkpoints to stop traffic only at night during curfew hours, on an as-needed basis.

¶4. (S) General Casey warned that the use of checkpoints is

essential to the success of the Baghdad security plan. As it will not be possible to simultaneously implement the strategy in all of Baghdad,s neighborhoods, checkpoints are necessary to keep out car bombs and to prevent the return of terrorists and death squads. The operation,s success would be jeopardized without checkpoints. Intelligence Service Director General Al-Shawani agreed that checkpoints were critical to stopping death squads from crossing over from Sadr City.

¶5. (S) The Ambassador reframed the issue by suggesting that the key question was how to set up effective checkpoints with the least possible inconvenience. The issue could be studied and options developed for the Prime Minister. Maliki quickly agreed and asked that the subject be tasked to the Deputies Committee for National Security for further action.

CIVIC ACTION A KEY COMPONENT OF SECURITY PLAN

¶6. (S) The Ambassador joined General Casey in stressing that the military operation must be complemented by political and economic action from the Government of Iraq. They stressed the need for the Government of Iraq to disburse funds for reconstruction projects that could provide employment and a sense of optimism in newly-stabilized areas. This was part of successive post-operation steps that included a substantial Iraqi police presence to enter and hold areas cleared by the military.

SECTARIAN BALANCE

¶7. (C) The Prime Minister also opined that the Baghdad Security Plan must consider the issue of sectarian balance. He suggested that if Sadr City is blocked off, the route west to Fallujah should also be blocked. The residents of Sadr

BAGHDAD 00002927 002 OF 002

City should not feel as if they are under siege, Maliki cautioned, or they might pull back from reconciliation.

NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

¶8. (S) Maliki is trying to reconcile two competing objectives. Although he understands that his continued political viability may depend on his ability to deliver improved security, Maliki also hopes that he might be able to bring Al-Sadr and some Sunni Sheikhs back into the tent.

MALIKI DISAVOWS NIGHT RAIDS

¶9. (S) Maliki summoned the Ambassador and General Casey to a separate meeting on August 7 to discuss the previous night,s operation in Sadr City. The PM believed he had vetoed the operation. General Casey believed it had been approved. Maliki undertook to provide General Casey and MNF-I with clear judgments, i.e. a firm "yes" or "no," on future mission proposals. The PM said that the previous night,s raid had killed one person and injured twelve. He claimed the U.S. had bombed three homes and destroyed a gas station. General Casey responded that after gunmen attacked Iraqi & Coalition forces conducting the operation, coalition aircraft fired heavy machine guns, but no bombs were dropped. Maliki claimed the operation had dealt a blow to the political process. He urged the U.S. to end night operations and to try to conduct lower-profile, daytime operations. General Casey rejoined that military force is a "blunt instrument" but assured Maliki that the U.S. would not conduct missions without the PM,s approval.

COMMENT

¶10. (S) Maliki clearly feels politically vulnerable, and seems hesitant to make any further public pronouncements about the Baghdad Security Plan until the operation has been proven a success. He claimed, however, that even religious leaders will join him in publicly hailing a successful

operation. Maliki appears to be honestly optimistic about the prospects for national reconciliation; however, he does not yet seem to have fully considered how his reconciliation efforts can best be synchronized with security operations.

KHALILZAD